

# A Lover's Complaint

From off a hill whose concave womb reworded 1  
A plaintful story from a sistering vale, 2  
My spirits t' attend this double voice accorded, 3  
And down I laid to list the sad-tuned tale; 4  
Ere long espied a fickle maid full pale, 5  
Tearing of papers, breaking rings a-twain, 6  
Storming her world with sorrow's wind and rain.

Upon her head a platted hive of straw, 8  
Which fortified her visage from the sun, 9  
Whereon the thought might think sometimes it saw 10  
The carcass of a beauty spent and done. 11  
Time had not scythèd all that youth begun, 12  
Nor youth all quit, but spite of heaven's fell rage 13  
Some beauty peeped through lattice of seared age. 14

Oft did she heave her napkin to her eyne, 15  
Which on it had conceited characters, 16  
Laund'ring the silken figures in the brine  
That seasoned woe had pelleted in tears, 18  
And often reading what contents it bears;  
As often shrieking undistinguished woe,  
In clamors of all size, both high and low. 20

**1** **concave womb** hollow-shaped hillside. **reworded** echoed **2** **plaintful story** i.e., mournful sound (which turns out to be the grieving of a maiden). **sistering** neighboring **3** **attend** listen to. **double** (because echoed). **accorded** inclined, consented **4** **list** listen to. **sad-tuned** i.e., sung in a minor key **5** **fickle** i.e., perturbed, moody **6** **papers** i.e., love letters **8** **platted hive** i.e., woven hat **9** **fortified** protected **10** **the thought** the mind; that which thinks **11** **carcass** decaying lifeless remnant. **spent** consumed **13** **all quit** deserted every part. **fell** deadly, cruel **14** **seared** dried up **15** **heave** lift. **napkin** handkerchief. **eyne** eyes **16** **conceited characters** fanciful or emblematic devices **18** **seasoned** (1) matured (2) salted. **pelleted** formed into small globules **20** **undistinguished woe** incoherent cries of grief

Sometimes her leveled eyes their carriage ride, 22  
 As they did battery to the spheres intend; 23  
 Sometimes, diverted, their poor balls are tied 24  
 To th' orbèd earth; sometimes they do extend 25  
 Their view right on; anon their gazes lend 26  
 To every place at once, and, nowhere fixed, 27  
 The mind and sight distractedly commixed. 28

Her hair, nor loose nor tied in formal plat, 29  
 Proclaimed in her a careless hand of pride; 30  
 For some, untucked, descended her sheaved hat, 31  
 Hanging her pale and pinèd cheek beside; 32  
 Some in her threaden fillet still did bide, 33  
 And, true to bondage, would not break from thence,  
 Though slackly braided in loose negligence.

A thousand favors from a maund she drew 36  
 Of amber, crystal, and of beaded jet, 37  
 Which one by one she in a river threw,  
 Upon whose weeping margent she was set, 39  
 Like usury applying wet to wet, 40  
 Or monarch's hands that lets not bounty fall  
 Where want cries some, but where excess begs all. 42

**22** her . . . **ride** i.e., her eyes, directed and aimed like a cannon, swiveled about as on a gun carriage **23** **As . . . intend** as if they did intend to direct their fire against the heavens **24** **balls** eyeballs **24-25** **are . . . earth** seem fixed to the orb-shaped earth, to the ground **26** **right on** straight in front of her **26-27** **lend . . . once** i.e., roll distractedly everywhere **28** **The mind . . . commixed** her mind and sight wildly confused or mingled **29** **nor . . . nor** neither . . . nor. **in formal plat** neatly braided **30** **careless . . . pride** hand careless of appearances **31** **descended** hung from. **sheaved straw** **32** **Hanging . . . beside** hanging beside her pale cheek wasted with pining **33** **threaden fillet** i.e., ribbon binding her hair **36** **favors** love tokens. **maund** woven basket with handles **37** **beaded jet** jet beads **39** **weeping margent** moist bank (though *weeping* also applies to her) **40** **usury** i.e., adding money to money; she adds tears to the river's water **42** **Where . . . all** i.e., (not) where the needy cry out for some charity, but where the rich beg all the bounty there is

Of folded schedules had she many a one, 43  
 Which she perused, sighed, tore, and gave the flood; 44  
 Cracked many a ring of posied gold and bone, 45  
 Bidding them find their sepulchers in mud;  
 Found yet more letters sadly penned in blood,  
 With sleided silkfeat and affectedly 48  
 Enswathed and sealed to curious secrecy. 49

These often bathed she in her fluxive eyes, 50  
 And often kissed, and often 'gan to tear;  
 Cried, "O false blood, thou register of lies,  
 What unapprovèd witness dost thou bear!  
 Ink would have seemed more black and damnèd here!"  
 This said, in top of rage the lines she rents, 55  
 Big discontent so breaking their contents. 56

A reverend man that grazed his cattle nigh— 57  
 Sometime a blusterer, that the ruffle knew 58  
 Of court, of city, and had let go by  
 The swiftest hours, observèd as they flew— 60  
 Towards this afflicted fancy fastly drew,  
 And, privileged by age, desires to know  
 In brief the grounds and motives of her woe. 61

43 schedules papers containing writing, i.e., letters 44 gave the flood  
 threw in the stream 45 posied inscribed with a motto 48 sleided  
 separated into threads. **feat** feately, adroitly. **affectedly** lovingly  
 49 **Enswathed** . . . **secrecy** wrapped about (with the silk) and sealed  
 (with wax) into careful secrecy 50 **fluxive** flowing 52 **blood** i.e., the  
 blood in which the letters were written (l. 47), but with a sense also  
 of the *blood* or passion that has played her *false*. **register** record  
 53 **unapprovèd** unconfirmed, false 55 **in top of** in the height of. **rents**  
 rends, tears 56 **discontent** . . . **contents** (with a play of antithesis)  
 57 **reverend** aged 58 **Sometime** at one time. **blusterer** boisterous  
 fellow. **ruffle** commotion, bustle 60 **swiftest hours** i.e., time of  
 youth. **observèd as they flew** (This man has let his youth go by and  
 disappear, but not without observing and learning from the years as  
 they flew.) 61 **fancy** i.e., amorous passion, and the person expressing  
 it. **fastly** (1) quickly (2) in close proximity

So slides he down upon his grainèd bat, 64  
 And comely-distant sits he by her side, 65  
 When he again desires her, being sat, 66  
 Her grievance with his hearing to divide. 67  
 If that from him there may be aught applied 68  
 Which may her suffering ecstasy assuage, 69  
 'Tis promised in the charity of age.

"Father," she says, "though in me you behold 71  
 The injury of many a blasting hour, 72  
 Let it not tell your judgment I am old;  
 Not age, but sorrow, over me hath power.  
 I might as yet have been a spreading flower, 75  
 Fresh to myself, if I had self-applied  
 Love to myself and to no love beside. 76

"But, woe is me! Too early I attended 78  
 A youthful suit—it was to gain my grace— 79  
 O, one by nature's outwards so commended 80  
 That maidens' eyes stuck over all his face. 81  
 Love lacked a dwelling and made him her place; 82  
 And when in his fair parts she did abide,  
 She was new lodged and newly deified.

"His browny locks did hang in crooked curls,  
 And every light occasion of the wind 86  
 Upon his lips their silken parcels hurls. 87  
 What's sweet to do, to do will aptly find; 88  
 Each eye that saw him did enchant the mind,  
 For on his visage was in little drawn 90  
 What largeness thinks in Paradise was sown. 91

**64 So . . . bat** and so he lowers himself by means of his club or staff that is worn and showing the grain **65 comely-distant** at a decorous distance **66 being** he being **67 divide** share **68 If that if** **69 ecstasy** frenzy (of grief) **71 Father** i.e., old man **72 blasting** blighting, withering **75 spreading** unfolding **76 Fresh to myself** i.e., like a flower that lives and dies unseen and unplucked **78 attended** heeded **79 grace** favor **80 nature's outwards** the physical appearance given him by nature **81 stuck over** i.e., were glued to **82 Love** Venus **86 occasion** i.e., stirring **87 Upon . . . hurls** (the wind) tosses the *silken parcels*, the curls, against his lips **88 to do will aptly find** i.e., will find a doer or an occasion **90 in little** in miniature **91 What . . . sown** what one supposes was seen in full scale in Paradise

“Small show of man was yet upon his chin;	93
His phoenix down began but to appear	93
Like unshorn velvet on that termless skin	94
Whose bare outbragged the web it seemed to wear.	95
Yet showed his visage by that cost more dear;	96
And nice affections wavering stood in doubt	97
If best were as it was, or best without.	98
“His qualities were beauteous as his form,	99
For maiden-tongued he was, and thereof free;	100
Yet, if men moved him, was he such a storm	101
As oft twixt May and April is to see,	102
When winds breathe sweet, unruly though they be.	
His rudeness so with his authorized youth	104
Did livery falseness in a pride of truth.	105
“Well could he ride, and often men would say,	
‘That horse his mettle from his rider takes.	107
Proud of subjection, noble by the sway,	108
What rounds, what bounds, what course, what stop he	
makes!	109
And controversy hence a question takes,	110
Whether the horse by him became his deed,	111
Or he his manage by th' well-doing steed.	112

93 **phoenix** i.e., suggesting his unique perfection (since only one phoenix, a mythical bird, exists at one time) 94 **termless** indescribable; youthful 95 **bare outbragged** bareness surpassed. **web** i.e., covering, the downy beard 96 **cost** (1) expense (2) rich covering; i.e., his face seemed lovelier because of its rich or silken covering. **dear** (1) costly (2) lovely 97 **nice affections** carefully discriminating tastes, inclinations 98 **without** i.e., lacking the downy beard 99 **qualities were** manner was as 100 **maiden-tongued** modest of speech, soft-spoken. **free** eloquent; innocent 101 **moved** i.e., to anger 102 **to see** to be seen 104-105 **His . . . truth** his roughness, privileged by his youth, thereby did dress falseness in a magnificent garment or concealment of truth 107 **mettle** vigor and strength of spirit 108 **noble by the sway** made noble by the way he's controlled 109 **stop** sudden check in a horse's "career" or trial gallop at full speed. (All the terms here are terms of *manage*, l. 112, the schooling or handling of a horse.) 110 **takes** takes up, considers 111-112 **Whether . . . steed** whether it was owing to his horsemanship that his horse acted so becomingly or whether he seemed such a good rider because he had so good a horse

“But quickly on this side the verdict went:  
His real habitude gave life and grace 114  
To appertainings and to ornament,  
Accomplished in himself, not in his case. 115  
All aids, themselves made fairer by their place, 117  
Came for additions, yet their purposed trim 118  
Pieced not his grace, but were all graced by him. 119

“So on the tip of his subduing tongue  
All kind of arguments and question deep, 122  
All replication prompt and reason strong,  
For his advantage still did wake and sleep. 123  
To make the weeper laugh, the laugher weep,  
He had the dialect and different skill, 125  
Catching all passions in his craft of will, 126

“That he did in the general bosom reign 127  
Of young, of old, and sexes both enchanted,  
To dwell with him in thoughts, or to remain  
In personal duty, following where he haunted. 130  
Consents bewitched, ere he desire, have granted,  
And dialogued for him what he would say, 131  
Asked their own wills, and made their wills obey. 132

114 **habitude** constitution, temperament 116 **case** conditions and circumstances, e.g., the possession of so good a horse 117 **place** i.e., place near to him or on his person 118 **Came for additions** came in for consideration as additional graces. **purposed trim** intended function as adornment 119 **Pieced** mended, augmented 122 **replication** reply. **reason strong** persuasive argument 123 **still** continually. **wake and sleep** i.e., work in varying moods, now actively, now insinuatingly 125 **dialect** manner of expression. **different** varied, readily adaptable 126 **passions** (1) passions of his hearers (2) passions incorporated into his moving speech. **craft of will** skill in persuasion 127 **That so that.** **general bosom** hearts of all 130 **In personal duty** i.e., like a personal servant. **haunted** frequented 131-133 **Consents . . . obey** i.e., women have consented to his will before he even asked them, and have made up his love speeches to them for him, and have made themselves obey their own desires

"Many there were that did his picture get	135
To serve their eyes, and in it put their mind,	
Like fools that in th' imagination set	
The goodly objects which abroad they find	137
Of lands and mansions, theirs in thought assigned,	138
And laboring in more pleasures to bestow them	139
Than the true gouty landlord which doth owe them;	140
"So many have, that never touched his hand,	141
Sweetly supposed them mistress of his heart.	142
My woeful self, that did in freedom stand,	
And was my own fee simple, not in part,	144
What with his art in youth, and youth in art,	
Threw my affections in his charmèd power,	146
Reserved the stalk and gave him all my flower.	
"Yet did I not, as some my equals did,	148
Demand of him, nor being desired yielded;	149
Finding myself in honor so forbid,	150
With safest distance I mine honor shielded.	151
Experience for me many bulwarks builded	152
Of proofs new-bleeding, which remained the foil	153
Of this false jewel, and his amorous spoil.	154

135 **in it . . . mind** let their minds become engrossed with it  
 137 **objects** i.e., of sight. **abroad** round about them, in the world  
 138 **theirs . . . assigned** imagining those possessions to be their own  
 139 **laboring . . . them** striving to derive more pleasure from them  
 140 **owe own** 141 **So many** thus many persons, many women  
 142 **them themselves** 144 **was . . . part** i.e., had total control of my own  
 destiny, not partial control, as of land held in freehold 146 **charmèd**  
**power** power to charm or cast a spell 148 **my equals** i.e., of those  
 equal to me in age and station 149 **Demand . . . yielded** i.e., ask him to  
 take me, or yield myself to him the moment he desired me to 150 **in**  
**honor so forbid** forbidden by (maidenly) honor to do so (i.e., to yield  
 at once) 151 **With safest distance** by staying at a safe distance  
 152-153 **Experience . . . new-bleeding** i.e., the experience of those  
 recently undone in love by him provided me with many defenses  
 153 **foil** dark background used to show off the brilliance of a jewel  
 154 **this false jewel** i.e., the young man. **spoil** plunder; that which is  
 spoiled

"But, ah, who ever shunned by precedent  
The destined ill she must herself assay? 156  
Or forced examples, 'gainst her own content,  
To put the by-past perils in her way? 157  
Counsel may stop awhile what will not stay;  
For when we rage, advice is often seen  
By blunting us to make our wits more keen. 158  
159  
160  
161

"Nor gives it satisfaction to our blood  
That we must curb it upon others' proof, 162  
To be forbade the sweets that seems so good  
For fear of harms that preach in our behoof. 163  
O appetite, from judgment stand aloof!  
The one a palate hath that needs will taste,  
Though Reason weep and cry, 'It is thy last.' 164  
165  
166  
167

"For further I could say 'This man's untrue,'  
And knew the patterns of his foul beguiling; 168  
Heard where his plants in others' orchards grew,  
Saw how deceits were gilded in his smiling; 169  
Knew vows were ever brokers to defiling;  
Thought characters and words merely but art,  
And bastards of his foul adulterate heart. 170  
171  
172  
173  
174

**156 assay** learn by experience **157 forced** proffered, urged. **content** i.e., presumed happiness in love **158 To . . . way** to raise as objections (to her own love happiness) the past perils (of others) **159 stay** remain stopped forever **160 rage** i.e., in passion **161 By . . . keen** i.e., in attempting to stop us, merely making us all the more ingenious and eager **162 blood** passion **163 proof** experience **164 seems** i.e., seem **165 preach in our behoof** i.e., offer us good advice aimed at benefiting us **166 O appetite . . . aloof** i.e., beware lest passion overwhelm reason by its immediacy **167 The one** i.e., passion, *appetite*. **needs will taste** insists upon gratification **169 say . . . untrue** tell of this man's faithlessness **170 knew . . . beguiling** i.e., had examples of his treachery before me **171 plants** i.e., children illegitimately begotten. **orchards gardens** **172 gilded** given a gilded (false) surface **173 brokers** panders **174 characters and words** i.e., the written and spoken word. **art** artifice

“And long upon these terms I held my city,  
Till thus he 'gan besiege me: 'Gentle maid,  
Have of my suffering youth some feeling pity,  
And be not of my holy vows afraid.  
That's to ye sworn to none was ever said;  
For feasts of love I have been called unto,  
Till now did ne'er invite, nor never woo.

“ 'All my offenses that abroad you see  
Are errors of the blood, none of the mind.  
Love made them not. With acture they may be,  
Where neither party is nor true nor kind.  
They sought their shame that so their shame did find;  
And so much less of shame in me remains  
By how much of me their reproach contains.

“ 'Among the many that mine eyes have seen,  
Not one whose flame my heart so much as warmed,  
Or my affection put to th' smallest teen,  
Or any of my leisures ever charmed.  
Harm have I done to them, but ne'er was harmed;  
Kept hearts in liveries, but mine own was free,  
And reigned, commanding in his monarchy.

176 **city** citadel (of chastity) 180 **That's** that which is 181-182 **For . . .**  
 woo I have been invited to other feasts of love before now, but never  
 until now did I do the inviting and the wooing 183 **abroad** in the world  
 around us 185-186 **With . . . kind** they may be physically performed  
 where neither partner is faithful or truly in love 188-189 **And . . .**  
**contains** i.e., and I am all the less to blame by how little their re-  
 proaches really accuse me (rather than themselves) 191 **Not one . . .**  
**warmed** i.e., there is not one whose flame of passion so much as  
 warmed my heart 192 **Or . . . teen** or gave my affection the least  
 sorrow (*teen*) 193 **Or . . . charmed** or put a spell on any of my times of  
 leisure 195 **in liveries** in the uniform of a person in service, i.e., almost  
 enslaved

“ ‘Look here what tributes wounded fancies sent me, 197  
 Of pallid pearls and rubies red as blood,  
 Figuring that they their passions likewise lent me 199  
 Of grief and blushes, aptly understood  
 In bloodless white and the encrimsoned mood— 201  
 Effects of terror and dear modesty, 202  
 Encamped in hearts but fighting outwardly. 203

“ ‘And, lo, behold these talents of their hair, 204  
 With twisted metal amorously impleached, 205  
 I have received from many a several fair, 206  
 Their kind acceptance weepingly beseeched, 207  
 With th’ annexions of fair gems enriched, 208  
 And deep-brained sonnets that did amplify 209  
 Each stone’s dear nature, worth, and quality.

“ ‘The diamond? Why, ’twas beautiful and hard, 212  
 Whereto his invised properties did tend;  
 The deep-green emerald, in whose fresh regard 213  
 Weak sights their sickly radiance do amend;  
 The heaven-hued sapphire and the opal blend 215  
 With objects manifold—each several stone,  
 With wit well blazoned, smiled or made some moan. 216

197 **wounded fancies** i.e., doting young women 199 **Figuring** symbolizing  
 201 **mood** mode, form, emotional state (i.e., blushing) 202 **Effects**  
 the signs or results. **dear** precious; deeply felt 203 **but fighting**  
 outwardly and only feigning resistance 204 **talents** i.e., treasures,  
 riches. (Literally, coins or valuable metal plates.) 205 **impleached**  
 intertwined 206 **a several fair** different beautiful ladies 207 **Their kind . . . beseeched** who have besought me with their tears to accept  
 their gifts kindly 208 **annexions** additions 209 **deep-brained** intricate.  
**amplify** enlarge upon, go into detail about 212 **Whereto . . . tend** toward which its invisible properties incline. (*Invised*, used nowhere else, is of uncertain meaning.) The young man too is beautiful and hard. 213 **regard** aspect, sight 214 **radiance** power of vision. (The emerald helps repair weak vision to those who look at it, just as the young man refreshes the eyes by his beauty.) 215-216 **blend . . . manifold** blended with many colors (?) or, blended with (or that blends with) many objects presented to the sight (?) 217 **blazoned** proclaimed, catalogued (in the accompanying sonnets)

“ ‘Lo, all these trophies of affections hot,  
Of pensive and subdued desires the tender,  
Nature hath charged me that I hoard them not,  
But yield them up where I myself must render,  
That is, to you, my origin and ender;  
For these, of force, must your oblations be,  
Since, I their altar, you enpatron me.

“ ‘O, then, advance of yours that phraseless hand,  
Whose white weighs down the airy scale of praise!  
Take all these similes to your own command,  
Hallowed with sighs that burning lungs did raise;  
What me, your minister, for you obeys,  
Works under you; and to your audit comes  
Their distract parcels in combinèd sums.

“ ‘Lo, this device was sent me from a nun,  
Or sister sanctified, of holiest note,  
Which late her noble suit in court did shun,  
Whose rarest havings made the blossoms dote;  
For she was sought by spirits of richest coat,  
But kept cold distance, and did thence remove  
To spend her living in eternal love.

218 **affections** passions 219 **pensive** saddened. **tender** offering  
 220 **ender** end, conclusion. (You are the source of my life and that  
 without which I cannot live.) 223 **of force** perforce. **your oblations**  
 offerings made at the altar of love for you 224 **Since . . . me** since I am  
 the altar (on which these gifts are offered), and you are my patron saint  
 (to whom the altar is dedicated) 225 **phraseless** which no words can  
 describe 226 **weighs . . . praise** i.e., outweighs in the scales any praise  
 that can be offered to it in airy words 227 **similes** i.e., symbolic  
 love tokens or gems accompanied by symbolic explanation in the  
 sonnets 228 **Hallowed** consecrated. **burning** i.e., hot with passion  
 229-230 **What . . . you** i.e., whatever obeys me and is at my command  
 as your minister or agent acting on your authority is thus yours also  
 230 **audit** accounting 231 **distract** separate 233 **note** reputation  
 234 **Which . . . shun** i.e., who recently shunned the attendance at court  
 to which her noble rank entitled her. **suit in attendance at** 235 **Whose**  
 . . . **dote** i.e., whose rare gift of beauty made the young courtiers (in the  
 blossom of their life) dote on her 236 **spirits** spirited young men.  
**coat** coat of arms, i.e., descent 237 **remove** depart 238 **living**  
 lifetime. **eternal love** love of the eternal God (i.e., she became a nun)

“ ‘But, O my sweet, what labor is ’t to leave  
The thing we have not, mast’ring what not strives,  
Paling the place which did no form receive,  
Playing patient sports in unconstrainèd gyves?  
She that her fame so to herself contrives,  
The scars of battle scapeth by the flight  
And makes her absence valiant, not her might. 245

“ ‘O, pardon me, in that my boast is true!  
The accident which brought me to her eye  
Upon the moment did her force subdue,  
And now she would the cagèd cloister fly.  
Religious love put out religion’s eye.  
Not to be tempted, would she be immured,  
And now to tempt all liberty procured. 252

“ ‘How mighty then you are, O, hear me tell!  
The broken bosoms that to me belong  
Have emptied all their fountains in my well,  
And mine I pour your ocean all among.  
I strong o’er them, and you o’er me being strong,  
Must for your victory us all congest,  
As compound love to physic your cold breast. 259

**239-242 what . . . gyves** i.e., how can it be called a difficult thing to give up something we haven't tried yet, mastering an emotion that offers no resistance, *paling*, or fencing, in the heart upon which no lover has yet made any impression, patiently pretending to endure restraints that in fact impose no restraint and that one is not obliged to endure

**243** fame . . . contrives devises for herself a reputation (for renouncing love) **245** makes . . . might i.e., shows valor only in avoiding temptation

tion, not in confronting it directly 246 my boast i.e., that she could resist me only by fleeing, not when she saw me 248 Upon the mor-

ment at once 249 would . . . fly wished to flee the locked con-  
250 Religious . . . eye i.e. love of me put out love of the divine

250 Religious . . . eye i.e., love of me put out love of the divine  
251-252 Not . . . procured before she wished to be shut up from

251-252 Not . . . procured before, she wished to be shut up from temptation, but now she sought liberty to venture everything. (The quarto reads *enur'd* for *immured*, and perhaps should be *inured*, hab-

254 bosoms i.e., hearts  
victorious 258 for because of.  
255 well spring, stream 257 strong  
us all i.e., my admirers and myself.

**congest** gather together 259 **compound** love i.e., love compounded of the various loves of myself and my former loves. (*Compound* also has the suggestion of a drug.) **physic** cure

“ ‘My parts had power to charm a sacred nun, Who, disciplined, ay, dieted in grace, Believed her eyes when they t’ assail begun, All vows and consecrations giving place.	260 261 262
O most potential love! Vow, bond, nor space, In thee hath neither sting, knot, nor confine, For thou art all, and all things else are thine.	264 265
“ ‘When thou impressest, what are precepts worth Of stale example? When thou wilt inflame, How coldly those impediments stand forth Of wealth, of filial fear, law, kindred, fame! Love’s arms are peace, ’gainst rule, ’gainst sense, ’gainst shame,	267 268 271
And sweetens, in the suffering pangs it bears, The aloes of all forces, shocks, and fears.	272 273
“ ‘Now all these hearts that do on mine depend, Feeling it break, with bleeding groans they pine, And, suppliant, their sighs to you extend To leave the battery that you make ’gainst mine, Lending soft audience to my sweet design, And credent soul to that strong-bonded oath That shall prefer and undertake my troth.’	275 276 277 279 280

**260 parts** qualities   **261 disciplined** subjected to religious discipline.  
**dietet** nourished, controlled   **262 assail** i.e., assail her heart  
**264 potential** powerful   **264-265 Vow . . . confine** against you vows have no strength (*sting*), bonds have no binding force (*knot*), and space is no barrier or impediment (*confine*)   **267 thou impressest** you make an impression on a heart, or conscript it into your service   **267-268 what . . . example** of what worth are moralistic warnings based on stale old instances   **271 Love’s . . . shame** i.e., love’s might enforces its own peace in the teeth of reason, good sense, and decorum   **272 it bears** that it (love) brings, the pangs that lovers must suffer   **273 aloes** i.e., bitterness. **forces** acts of force. **shocks** clashes   **275 break** i.e., break in disappointment at the threat of rejection by the woman now addressed. **bleeding groans** (Each groan was thought to cost the heart a drop of blood.)   **276 suppliant** as supplicants   **277 leave** leave off   **279 credent** believing, trusting   **280 prefer** advance. **undertake** guarantee, see through to the end

"This said, his watery eyes he did dismount, 281  
 Whose sights till then were leveled on my face; 282  
 Each cheek a river running from a fount  
 With brinish current downward flowed apace.  
 O, how the channel to the stream gave grace! 285  
 Who glazed with crystal gate the glowing roses  
 That flame through water which their hue encloses. 286

"O father, what a hell of witchcraft lies 288  
 In the small orb of one particular tear!  
 But with the inundation of the eyes  
 What rocky heart to water will not wear?  
 What breast so cold that is not warmed here?  
 O cleft effect! Cold modesty, hot wrath, 293  
 Both fire from hence and chill extincture hath. 294

"For, lo, his passion, but an art of craft, 295  
 Even there resolved my reason into tears;  
 There my white stole of chastity I daffed, 296  
 Shook off my sober guards and civil fears;  
 Appear to him as he to me appears, 297  
 All melting; though our drops this difference bore:  
 His poisoned me, and mine did him restore. 298

**281** **dismount** remove from its mount, lower (as with an artillery piece) **282** **leveled on** aimed at **285** **channel . . . stream** i.e., cheek to the flow of tears **286** **Who** which, i.e., the stream of tears. **gate** i.e., a protective layer **288** **father** i.e., the old man to whom she is talking **289** **particular** single **293** **cleft** twofold. **wrath** passion (the wrath of love) **294** **extincture** extinguishing **295** **passion** passionate wooing. **but an art** merely an artifice **296** **resolved** dissolved **297** **daffed** doffed, put off **298** **guards** defenses. **civil** decorous, grave **299** **Appear** I did appear **300** **drops** i.e., tears (which here have medicinal qualities)

"In him a plenitude of subtle matter,	302
Applied to cautels, all strange forms receives,	303
Of burning blushes, or of weeping water,	
Or swooning paleness; and he takes and leaves,	305
In either's aptness, as it best deceives,	306
To blush at speeches rank, to weep at woes,	
Or to turn white and swoon at tragic shows;	307
"That not a heart which in his level came	309
Could scape the hail of his all-hurting aim,	310
Showing fair nature is both kind and tame;	311
And, veiled in them, did win whom he would maim.	312
Against the thing he sought he would exclaim;	
When he most burnt in heart-wished luxury,	314
He preached pure maid and praised cold chastity.	315
"Thus merely with the garment of a grace	316
The naked and concealed fiend he covered,	317
That th' unexperient gave the tempter place,	318
Which like a cherubin above them hovered.	319
Who, young and simple, would not be so lovered?	320
Ay me! I fell, and yet do question make	321
What I should do again for such a sake.	322

**302 subtle matter** matter capable of being variously impressed or formed **303 cautels** crafty devices **305 takes and leaves** i.e., uses one and avoids the other **306 In either's aptness** whichever is more appropriate **307 rank** gross **309 That** so that. **level** range and aim. (Continues the metaphor of siege.) **310 Could** that could. **hail** i.e., of artillery **311 Showing . . . tame** i.e., his aim being to represent his true nature as loving and docile **312 And . . . maim** and, disguised thus in kindness and docility, or in *blushes*, *weeping*, and *paleness* (ll. 304-305), won the heart of the woman he intended to harm **314 heart-wished** luxury deeply desired lechery **315 pure maid** as if he were an untouched virgin **316 with . . . grace** with a charming outward show or appearance (perhaps suggesting also one of the three Graces) **317 The naked . . . covered** he covered his fiendish inner self with concealment **318 inexperience** inexperienced. **place** entry **319 Which . . . hovered** who, resembling a cherub, hovered over his victims as though offering them protection **320 simple** naive. **be so lovered** surrender to a lover like him **321 question make** i.e., ask myself **322 for such a sake** for someone like him, or for the sake of falling into such pleasure—however brief

"O, that infected moisture of his eye, 323  
O, that false fire which in his cheek so glowed,  
O, that forced thunder from his heart did fly, 325  
O, that sad breath his spongy lungs bestowed, 326  
O, all that borrowed motion seeming owed, 327  
Would yet again betray the fore-betrayed,  
And new pervert a reconcilèd maid!" 329

323 **infected** infectious 325 **forced** feigned. **from** that from  
326 **spongy lungs** lungs that are spongelike (as all lungs are; perhaps  
with the suggestion of "blown up with flattery and pretended grief")  
327 **borrowed . . . owed** pretended action that seemed in earnest. **owed**  
owned, his own 329 **reconcilèd** penitent

## Date and Text

*A Lover's Complaint* first appeared in Thomas Thorpe's 1609 edition of the sonnets. It may have been printed from the same transcript as that used to print the sonnets. The poem is not mentioned on the title page of the volume, but has its own head-title on sig. K<sup>v</sup>: "A Louers complaint. By William Shake-speare." For the reliability of this attribution, see the Introduction to *A Lover's Complaint*.

## Textual Notes

These textual notes are not a historical collation; they are simply a record of departures in this edition from the copy text. The reading adopted in this edition appears in boldface, followed by the rejected reading from the copy text, i.e., the quarto of 1609. Only major alterations in punctuation are noted. Corrections of minor and obvious typographical errors are not indicated.

Copy text: the Sonnet quarto of 1609 [Q].

**7 sorrow's** sorrowes, **14 lattice** lettice **37 beaded** bedded **51 'gan** gaue  
**95 wear** were **103 breathe** breath **112 manage** mannad'g **118 Came** Can  
**164 forbade** forbod **182 woo** vovv **198 pallid** palyd **204 hair**  
heir **205 metal** mettle **228 Hallowed** Hollowed **251 immured** enur'd  
**252 procured** procure **260 nun** Sunne **293 O** Or **303 strange** straing